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## LITERARY LANDSCAPE

## The state of out-of-state arts

By Sneed B. Collard III

Election night, I – like many of you – got a televised view of McCormick Place, Chicago, where thousands of Obama supporters came to celebrate. I watched the event with added interest, however. Why? Because my wife and I had recently been there as participants in the country's largest educational event, the convention of the International Reading Association.

Each year, between eight and twenty thousand teachers, librarians, and other educators attend IRA. Publishers and other educational entities set up acres of booths, and for obvious reasons. The convention offers a rare chance to connect with the most influential educators in the country. For authors, it's a chance to meet people, sign books and land speaking invitations.

I had spoken and signed books at the convention half a dozen times before 2012, but with the struggling economy and floundering publishing industry, I decided to step up my game. For the first time, I joined a small number of other authors in buying my own booth.

The only problem was money. The cost of the booth alone ran \$1,600. Add in airfare, hotel and meals, and receipts promised to top \$4,000. To help me with this prohibitive figure, I applied for one of MAC's Strategic Investment Grants and happily received one. Still, I wondered, would the cost be worth it?

I cannot produce any charts and graphs, but my gut answers a resounding "yes." During the three days of the convention, hundreds of teachers from all over the country stopped by my booth. I also spoke at two separate IRA sessions. I didn't come home with cash in my pockets, but did get something more important – the foundation for a lot of future business.

I conservatively estimate that 90 percent of my income is generated outside of Montana, both from speaking invitations and book sales. The challenge is how to find that work. Nothing in my 30-year career has worked like meeting teachers and book-buyers face-to-face.

This isn't really a surprise. When I meet an author personally, I take a much greater interest in his or her work. The same is true for teachers. It's hard to gauge the effect on book

sales, but almost *all* of my speaking invitations come from conventions such as IRA. In fact, I have already received two important speaking invitations from the recent convention in Chicago.

I feel so strongly about the benefits of these conferences that I have signed up for a booth at next year's IRA convention in San Antonio. Once again, I have been fortunate to receive a Strategic Investment Grant to help make the enterprise feasible.

Of course, you might ask, "Is this a wise use of SIG funds?" Well, remember that statement that 90 percent of my income is generated out of state? Guess where 90 percent of that income is *spent*? Right here in Montana. It's a no-brainer that each grant invested in artists reaps rich rewards, not just for we artists, but for the entire state.

Being an author or artist is not for the faint of heart. Most of us constantly struggle to make ends meet. I am so grateful that forward-thinking policy makers have made funds available to help me and others do what we do best. Thank you MAC, the State of Montana, and the National Endowment for the Arts (yes, that is the *Federal government!*) for having the wisdom to invest in our collective future.



Sneed Collard lives in Missoula and is the author of more than 60 books for children. In 2006, he received the *Washington Post* Children's Book Guild Nonfiction Writer of the Year Award for his body of work.

## Web resources for writers

**Every Writer's Resource, [www.everywritersresource.com](http://www.everywritersresource.com):** This website offers a listing of the top 50 literary magazines, as well as the top 50 online literary magazines. The abundant content also includes a list of book and magazine publishers, tips for students in university writing programs, suggestions on how to promote your writing, and print-on-demand resources.

**Poets & Writers, [www.pw.org](http://www.pw.org):** Considered by many to be the best source for poets and writers, this website offers features from the award-winning print edition, daily news items, advice from writers, and a popular blog about writing contests.

## MONTANA POET LAUREATE

## The Dangers of Non-Fiction

by Sheryl Noethe

*Working at the Homeless Shelter*

Photo by Kurt Wilson

Reluctantly he relinquished the pills he'd been hoarding.  
I'd stolen his suicide, forced him to live again,  
For those feelings, he said, I hate you, mama bear.  
I wanted to tell his story to the world;  
how easily people lose everything, through tragedy,  
through drink, geeking and gacking and tweaking.  
Women whose violent husbands cost them their children.  
Women with no teeth.

His story came out in the newspaper,  
when someone found his son and his wife  
were not dead, just a divorce.  
To Robert this separation was death.  
He believed his terrible story, and so did we.

The article appeared the next day revealing his fictions.  
He slipped away before dawn, his backpack and light coat,  
his fever, and his missing teeth.  
Gone, not a word, no phone calls, not a look behind.  
He told me he could not make it on the streets again.  
You don't know how brutal it is, he said.  
Now he's out there, by himself, the seven dollars  
I gave him folded into his jeans.

It's turning winter, and he can't make it on the streets.  
Because he believed his fiction. Which of us don't?  
What if our fabrications were laid bare? Who would run?  
The truth won't keep you alive on the road.  
He crossed Key West, dipping first into the Atlantic,  
then just a few steps to the Pacific, and celebrated  
with pitchers of tequila, cases of beer and strangers.

He was at the ocean. He did have a wife, work, a PhD.  
I believe his little brother died of asthma on the school bus.  
I wanted to shelter him like a brother, I wanted  
to bring him into my world.  
Daily I pound it into my head  
he was not my own. All I have left is his story,  
all I have left is what I thought I'd known.

## Organization aids and represents freelance writers

Founded in 1948, the American Society of Journalists and Authors (ASJA) is the nation's professional organization of independent nonfiction writers, and consists of more than 1,300 freelance writers of magazine articles, trade books, and many other forms of nonfiction writing.

ASJA offers benefits and services focusing on professional development, including regular confidential market information, meetings with editors and others in the field, a referral service, seminars and workshops, discount services, and the opportunity for members to explore professional issues and concerns with their peers.

ASJA also represents freelancers' interests, serving as spokesman for their right to control and profit from uses of their work in the new media and otherwise. It also helps provide ready access to writers proven in the marketplace, capable of producing articles, books, brochures and scripts through its Freelance Writer Search.

ASJA headquarters are in New York City, and the society has active regional chapters throughout the U.S.

Learn more at [www.asja.org](http://www.asja.org).